

LEVEL  
ONE

# Light

... on a  
New World

Scripture and Union

1813



*Published for the Bexley Christadelphian Ecclesia by*



*Light Bible Publications  
37 Dickens Close, Hartley,  
Dartford DA3 8DP, England*

**EDITOR**

*M. J. Walker, 15 Brentfield Road,  
Dartford, Kent DA1 1YJ, England*

**CORRESPONDENCE EDITOR**

*David Evans, 57 Longmead Drive,  
Sidcup, Kent DA14 4NT, England*

---

**VOLUME ELEVEN**

**NUMBER 8**

**MARCH/APRIL 1990**

**CONTENTS**

---

|                            |         |
|----------------------------|---------|
| <b>The Bible</b>           | page 1  |
| <b>Why read the Bible?</b> | page 7  |
| <b>Hope</b>                | page 12 |

# The Bible

---

THE BIBLE MAKES great claims. It clearly states that its author is God—the Creator of the universe. It claims to reveal God and His purpose and it speaks with authority. If this claim cannot be upheld, then the Bible is the greatest and the most cruel hoax which has ever deluded mankind.

If the claims of the Bible can be supported, then we are in possession of the world's greatest treasure.

The Bible as the true Word of God contains the key to peace and happiness. It answers the most perplexing questions concerning the meaning and purpose of our existence and the final outcome of the struggle between right and wrong.

Let us look more closely at its claims.

Paul, writing of the Old Testament, says '*All scripture is given by inspiration of God.*'<sup>1</sup>

Every word of the original manuscripts was written under direct Divine guidance. The apostle Peter stressed the same fact,

'For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' (Holy Spirit—Revised Version)<sup>2</sup>

These two apostles claim Divine authority for the writings of the Old Testament recorded centuries before their own days. This Divine authority is responsible for the complete harmony of teaching revealed in the Bible. The writers were separated by time, education, occupation, experience and social position, yet their writings all combine to form one united Book.

## WHY THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN

The Bible tells us how the human race began and how God's plan of salvation will lead to the final victory of right over wrong and the extermination of every trace of sin and evil. The chief purpose of the Bible is to make known to the condemned

<sup>1</sup>*II Timothy 3. 16*   <sup>2</sup>*II Peter 1. 21*

human race this way of salvation through Jesus Christ. The Old and New Testaments combine to present Jesus as the only Saviour of mankind.

'These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.'<sup>3</sup>

In the pages of the Bible we find all the teaching necessary for man's enlightenment; the Divine definitions of right and wrong, and of man's duty to God and to his fellow-men.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the Bible has been given to tell us, in broad outline, what the future holds, that we might be prepared for the coming of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

### THE CONTENTS OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is a collection of books divided into two main sections. The books of the Old Testament were written before the time of Christ and the books of the New Testament after the time of Christ. There are 66 books altogether. You will find a list of them at the front of your Bible. They were written by about forty different writers over a period of 1,500 years. They were written in a number of different countries—such as Israel, Egypt, Italy and Babylon.

All the books combine in one consistent theme—the theme of the working out of God's purpose with man, from the very beginning recorded in Genesis to the time when, *'The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.'*<sup>6</sup>

### THE OLD TESTAMENT

The books of the Old Testament fall into four main sections:—

(a) **THE BOOKS OF MOSES**

The first book is called Genesis, which means the beginning. It tells us about God's dealings with the first men on the earth. Then follow Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. They tell how God called Abraham, made a covenant with him and with his descendants, brought them out of Egypt and gave them the land now called Israel.

(b) **THE HISTORICAL BOOKS**

These, from the Book of Joshua to the Book of Esther, are a record of the history of the Israelites (or Jews) and of God's dealings with them.

(c) **THE POETIC BOOKS**

The books of Job, the Psalms, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs were written in Hebrew (the language of the Israelites) in poetic form. They contain much important teaching about the ways of God and the feelings and duties of man.

<sup>3</sup>John 2. 31    <sup>4</sup>II Timothy 3. 15-17    <sup>5</sup>II Peter 1. 19    <sup>6</sup>Revelation 11. 15

## (d) THE BOOKS OF THE PROPHETS

The word prophet means *seer*—one who has insight or visions, not only of future events, but also of God's requirements of man. The long prophetic books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are followed by a number of shorter ones.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

## (a) THE GOSPEL RECORDS

These are four separate accounts of the life of Christ, written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; each is telling the gospel (the good news) in his own way.

## (b) THE BOOK CALLED 'THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES'

This was written by Luke and tells what happened after Jesus Christ was risen from the dead. We are told how the first churches were formed as the apostles carried the good news throughout the Roman Empire.

## (c) THE LETTERS

These were written by some of the apostles to help the early believers in the small, scattered young churches.

## (d) THE BOOK OF REVELATION

This was the last message of Jesus, given in vision to the apostle John.

JESUS CHRIST BELIEVED EVERY WORD  
OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Jesus Christ is the central figure of the Bible plan and when he was born the New Testament did not exist. The Scriptures which he used and studied were the Old Testament. Jesus believed these Scriptures, he based his teaching on them and accepted them as indisputable authority.

Look at these passages: John 5. 46-47  
 Luke 24. 27  
 Luke 24. 44-48  
 Matthew 22. 29  
 Mark 7. 6-13

Jesus speaks of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and Solomon, and of many other people about whom we read in the Old Testament and bases his teaching on the fact that these people were real and that all of the Old Testament is the Word of God.

## THE BIBLE CANNOT BE PROVED FALSE

All the developments of modern thought and technology have combined to establish that the Bible records are true. Many enemies of the Bible, including some

very clever men, have tried to prove it wrong but they have all failed. Since truth cannot contradict itself, we should naturally expect the Word of God to be in harmony with observable scientific knowledge.

A further evidence of the authority of the Bible is the way in which it has been preserved over the centuries. The Bible has triumphantly withstood every effort of man to overthrow it. It has been suppressed and withheld from the common people; whole editions of it have been burned and many books have been written in attempts to disprove it. No other book has been subjected to such continuous and determined opposition; the Bible still stands, immovable and unconquerable.

The great antiquity of the Bible, its preservation and influence upon the human race are factors which cannot be ignored. The evidences of archaeological discoveries by such people as Rawlinson, Layard, Smith, Woolley and Kenyon in Egypt, Nineveh, Assyria, Babylon, Ur and Israel are all striking confirmations of the truth of Bible history. Exhibits in museums all over the world clearly demonstrate this. The inscriptions of nations which fought against Israel confirm the Bible accounts both of events and of ancient customs and local habits. Present-day archaeology continues to add material supporting our reasons for believing the truth of the whole Bible.

Even the criticisms relating to the care taken by the Jewish copyists of the original writings are discounted with the discovery of ancient manuscripts. The remarkable discovery in 1947 of the Dead Sea Scrolls has provided yet more valuable evidence of the accuracy of the Bible. These manuscripts are some of the earliest available, dating back to the second century B.C. Despite their age, the slight variations that do occur are only in respect of spelling and do not affect the doctrine, prophecy or historical facts.

So the work of the archaeologist confirms in a remarkable way the truth and reliability of the Bible and thus, indirectly, that it is the production of Divine inspiration.

### PROPHECY PROVES THE BIBLE TRUE

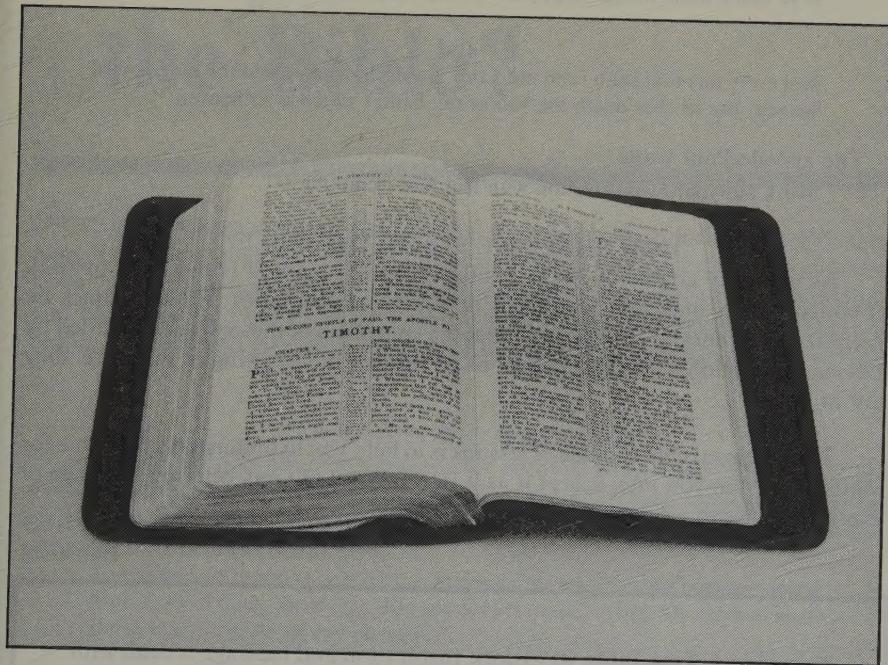
God Himself has chosen prophecy as a great proof of His infinite superiority over all other beings.<sup>7</sup>

The Bible speaks from time to time of events that would come to pass hundreds of years later. In Matthew 2 it is recorded that the wise men came to Jerusalem and asked, '*Where is he that is born King of the Jews?*' When Herod asked the chief priests this question, they at once replied, '*In Bethlehem of Judea*', because hundreds of years before it had been prophesied in one of the books of the Old Testament.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Isaiah 46. 9, 10; Isaiah 42. 9    <sup>8</sup>Micah 5. 2

In addition to prophecies about Jesus Christ, there are many relating to ancient nations and, in particular, to the Jews. Many of the ancient nations have disappeared from world affairs but the Bible said that the Jews would survive. The Jewish people still survive today in spite of many efforts to destroy them.<sup>9</sup> If the Bible had been of mere human production, at any time in history such a declaration could have been found false. The Jews are still with us today with their own state, Israel, and its capital city Jerusalem now in their complete control.

The Bible gives us the reasons for these facts. This is a powerful proof that the Bible is Divinely inspired and therefore infallible.



#### SUMMARY OF SOME OF THE REASONS FOR BELIEVING THE BIBLE TO BE INSPIRED

1. The unity of its message in spite of the number of writers who worked over a great period of time.
2. Its miraculous preservation.
3. The evidence of the discoveries of the archaeologist.
4. The fulfilment of Bible prophecies.

<sup>9</sup>Jeremiah 30, 10, 11

### CONDITIONS TO BE MET

If we are to understand the Bible, Jesus said we must become teachable as little children.<sup>10</sup> We must want to find out for ourselves the truth and wisdom of God's Word.<sup>11</sup>

We must believe that God will reward us in our search.<sup>12</sup>

We must be willing to bring our lives into harmony with God's commandments.

Jesus said,

'If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.'<sup>13</sup>

and

'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.'<sup>14</sup>

The apostle Paul wrote,

'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.'<sup>15</sup>

### HOW SHALL WE STUDY THE BIBLE?

As with any course of study, regular, planned reading is the most helpful. A concordance, marginal references or Bible commentaries can sometimes be helpful, but it must be remembered that the compilers of these were not guided by Divine inspiration. If their conclusions contradict the teaching of scripture, they are in error.<sup>16</sup>

The purpose of this course of lessons is to help you to understand the Bible for yourself, so that you may accept it as it is, the Word of God, offering the hope of everlasting life to all who will hear and obey it.

M. Fisher  
Banstead

The subject of the Bible, its history, inspiration and message is dealt with in much greater depth in a special illustrated booklet—

### LIGHT on the Bible

which can be obtained free of charge by writing to the Editor, M. J. Walker,  
15 Brentfield Road, Dartford, Kent DA1 1YJ, England.

<sup>10</sup>Matthew 11. 25      <sup>11</sup>Proverbs 2. 3-6      <sup>12</sup>Hebrews 11. 6; James 1. 5-7      <sup>13</sup>John 13. 17

<sup>14</sup>Matthew 7. 21      <sup>15</sup>Philippians 2. 12      <sup>16</sup>Isaiah 8. 20

# Why read the Bible?

---

THE SIMPLE ANSWER to this question is that the Bible is the priceless gift of God to man. It is unique among books. Its author is the great Eternal Creator: its contents reveal and explain the purpose of God in the creation of the earth and of mankind; and its power is to tell those who read it how to gain everlasting life. There is nothing in the world to compare with the Bible. The vital question is, 'Can we trust it?'

## REASONS FOR CONFIDENCE

God has given us abundant reasons for absolute confidence in His word. He invites us to consider the evidence of prophecy. 'Ask me of things to come.'<sup>1</sup> His power to foretell the future is the evidence for His existence and His Divine superintendence of world affairs.

'I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.'<sup>2</sup>

The Bible is a book of prophecy, from Genesis to Revelation. It describes in advance the rise and fall of nations; it speaks of some events that should come to pass, and of some that should never happen. Sometimes its prophecies concern the immediate future, sometimes a remote future of thousands of years. In so far as these prophecies relate to the time from their utterance to today, they have been fulfilled to the very letter. This fact inspires confidence in the fulfilment of prophecies which concern events still future, notably the second coming of Christ to the earth.

<sup>1</sup>Isaiah 45. 11    <sup>2</sup>Isaiah 46. 9, 10

The prophecies which concern the nation of Israel are a powerful evidence for the trustworthiness of the Bible. Of that nation, God declared, '*Ye are my witnesses*'. Nearly three thousand five hundred years ago, God, through Moses, foretold the persecution and scattering of the nation of Israel and the desolation of their homeland.<sup>3</sup> Yet that people would never be destroyed, nor even lose their identity. At an appointed time they would be regathered and once again become a nation in the land of their forefathers. This land would regain its fertility and become the scene of industry and prosperity.<sup>4</sup> These facts were the repeated theme of Israel's prophets. The past history and present condition of the people and land of Israel provide abundant evidence for the truth of the prophecies, and give complete assurance that the predictions concerning Israel's future glory will also become matters of fact.

### VITAL IMPORTANCE

In answering the question 'Why read the Bible?' the enlightened student can say, 'Because it contains vital information.' The word 'vital' has the meaning of life-giving. All mankind are under the shadow of death. But the Bible contains promises about life—not just a longer life, nor just a freer life, but everlasting life<sup>5</sup> coupled with everlasting joy.<sup>6</sup> These promises are interwoven with prophecy. The same Eternal God that uttered the prophecies has graciously made the promises.

The apostle John wrote, '*This is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.*'<sup>7</sup> The apostle Paul wrote that he lived '*In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.*'<sup>8</sup> The same apostle spoke of '*the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.*' These words draw attention to another important reason why we should read the Bible.

### TRUE CHRISTIANITY

The central figure of that Holy Book is Jesus Christ. Whatever views may be held concerning him, it must be admitted that he was a historic reality. The religious movement known as Christianity is traceable back through the centuries to him. The world-wide institutions, the stupendous changes in the ways of civilisation which are attributable to Jesus Christ, altogether exclude the theory that he was a myth. The facts related to his resurrection are equally certain as matters of history. Those facts are attested by many infallible proofs. The only reasonable explanation of the triumph of Christianity over Roman paganism, Greek philosophy, and Jewish prejudice in the first century A.D. lies in the true testimony of credible eyewitnesses concerning the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

The authentic records concerning Jesus Christ, his birth, his life, his death and his resurrection, are the writings of the New Testament. The writers of those records

<sup>3</sup>Deuteronomy 28, 15-68; Leviticus 26, 14-46   <sup>4</sup>Jeremiah 31, 10-34   <sup>5</sup>John 3, 16   <sup>6</sup>Isaiah 35, 10

<sup>7</sup>I John 2, 25   <sup>8</sup>Titus 1, 2; II Timothy 1, 1

claimed that they were inspired by God to set down accurately the teaching of their Master. A study of their lives, characters, and experiences reveals that they were honest and genuine men. The success of their preaching against such tremendous odds is proof that their message was founded on fact.

The essence of the teaching of the apostles was that the promise of everlasting life was obtainable only through the work of Jesus Christ. The apostle John expressly explained the purpose of his gospel record in these terms. He said,

'these (the contents of his narrative) are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that, believing, ye might have life through his name.'<sup>9</sup>

In the memorable prayer uttered by Jesus in the hearing of his disciples a few hours before his arrest and crucifixion, he said, '*This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*'<sup>10</sup>

Every aspect of the life and mission of Christ is referred to in both the Old and New Testaments and it therefore follows that to know and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, it is vitally necessary to read and understand the whole Bible. The text book of Jesus was '*Moses and all the prophets.*'<sup>11</sup> As he said to his disciples after the resurrection,

'These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.'<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, the apostles made many references to the Old Testament to support their arguments as they preached '*Jesus, and the resurrection.*'<sup>13</sup> Paul commended the disciple Timothy because of his love of the Holy Scriptures, which consisted at that time of the Old Testament. '*From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*'<sup>14</sup> No stronger reason could be advanced than this in answering the question, 'Why read the Bible?' In this same passage of Scripture, Paul sets his seal to the claim that the Old Testament is the work of Divine inspiration:

'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.'<sup>15</sup>

### INSPIRED BY GOD

This same claim to inspiration is made by the apostles of their own teaching. Paul commended the Thessalonian believers because, '*when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*'<sup>16</sup> The apostle John declares

<sup>9</sup>John 20.31 <sup>10</sup>John 17.3 <sup>11</sup>Luke 24.27 <sup>12</sup>Luke 24.44 <sup>13</sup>Acts 17.18 <sup>14</sup>II Timothy 3.15

<sup>15</sup>II Timothy 3.16, 17 <sup>16</sup>I Thessalonians 2.13

that the Divine message of the book of Revelation was given to him by an angel and that he 'bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ.'<sup>17</sup>

In the light of these exalted claims, it is reasonable that the Bible should be read as part of man's education; but this in itself is little compared with the spiritual blessings it bestows. The Bible can do more for us than anything else in the world. 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.'<sup>18</sup>

Faith, in the Bible, is not blind trust, but an intelligent appreciation of its contents, based on evidence. Its message is clearly super-human. Its Author has declared,

'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.'

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.'<sup>19</sup>

A careful reading of the Bible with an open unbiased mind will convince reflective readers of the truth of this sublime declaration. It has been well stated by one writer that 'the best way of attaining a thorough conviction of the authenticity and genuineness of the Scriptures and of their Divine origin is to read them constantly.'

The Bible is the revelation to man by God of the wonderful unfolding of a glorious purpose, stage by stage, in plain language, in symbol, in type, in allegory, in prose and in poetry, with the one theme running consistently throughout the entire range of its sixty-six books. This information is so compiled and written that a child can read and understand its elements, yet the oldest man living, whose whole life may have been spent in unravelling its mysteries, could not claim to have exhausted the study. The contents of the Bible can be explained only on the basis of the apostle Peter's statement, 'The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (Holy Spirit).'<sup>20</sup>

### THE DIVINE THEME

The Bible contains all that it is necessary to know about God and His creative work. It describes in simple language the creation of man, the introduction into the world of sin and the consequent estrangement of man from his Maker. It explains the condition of suffering and toil, disease and death, under which the human race now groans. It unfolds the Divine plan of human redemption through Christ, by which man may be reconciled to God, and related to promises of everlasting joy, happiness and peace. It speaks of the Divinely appointed conditions upon which God will restore man to His grace and love, and of the ultimate consummation of God's purpose to abolish all evil and to fill the earth with Divine glory.

<sup>17</sup>Revelation 1. 2    <sup>18</sup>Romans 10. 17    <sup>19</sup>Isaiah 55. 8, 9    <sup>20</sup>II Peter 1. 21

Meanwhile, the Bible gives a tranquillity of mind and gladness of heart unsurpassed by anything that this world can offer. '*Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.*'<sup>21</sup> Its promises are described as '*great and precious*',<sup>22</sup> and involve nothing less than participation in Divine nature.

Where else can you turn for a better message than this? Is there any satisfaction in human theories and speculations? Can the poet, the orator, the scientist, the philosopher, or even the Bible-rejecting theologian give you a satisfactory and authoritative meaning to the fact of human existence? Is the answer to man's problems to be found in a study of nature? In a sense, nature mocks man. Mountains, seas and rivers, the planets and constellations tell him that they are as fixed as he is transient. Nature's lesson is the lesson of the autumn leaves which fall dry and withered to the ground. The prophet declared,

'All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.'<sup>23</sup>

What shall be our attitude towards this Holy Book? Shall we regard it as the worthless production of a crafty and deceptive priesthood, or as the unbreakable word of the living God?

The following quotation tells us clearly why we should read the Bible diligently. This book 'reveals the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true and its decisions are unchangeable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be saved and practise it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveller's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter . . . Christ is its grand subject, our own good its design and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory and a river of pleasure . . . It involves the highest responsibility, rewards the greatest labour and condemns all who trifle with its holy contents.'

Let our assessment be that of the Psalmist, '*The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.*'<sup>24</sup>

H. T. Atkinson  
Banstead

<sup>21</sup>*Psalm 119. 165*   <sup>22</sup>*II Peter 1. 4*   <sup>23</sup>*Isaiah 40. 6-8*   <sup>24</sup>*Psalm 119. 144*

# Hope

---

LIFE WITHOUT HOPE hardly bears contemplation.

Even the dullest and most routine of days contains its elements of anticipated pleasure—the coffee break, the evening meal, or the weekend away. However trivial such things, without them life would be unbearable. Even though there is often more pleasure in the anticipation than in the realisation, man will continue to hope for better things in the future, continue to create objects and ambitions on which to set his aspirations. To 'hope against hope' is a phrase that aptly summarizes man's almost inexhaustible capacity to manufacture hope, even when no rational grounds for it exist—when his situation is in fact hopeless.

## HOPE AGAINST HOPE

That particular phrase is used once in the New Testament. The way it is used demonstrates what an enormous gulf separates the 'hope' of the scriptures from 'hope' as it is commonly accepted in the world in which we live. The passage where it occurs is a description of the life of Abraham—that great hero of faith of the Old Testament:

'Who against hope believed in hope . . . '<sup>1</sup>

What was Abraham so hopeful about? That his ninety-year-old wife Sarah would have a son! What possible grounds could he have had for such an extravagant hope? One, and one only—God had promised it. And Abraham believed God.

## THE REAL MEANING OF HOPE

What a world of difference there is between this kind of hope and hope as it is commonly understood! People may be hopeful for a number of reasons. They may

<sup>1</sup>*Romans 4. 18*

be naturally optimistic, given to looking on the brighter side, come rain or shine. They may find quite adequate rational grounds for being hopeful about the future. They may have the capacity themselves to bring about the objectives they long for. Did Abraham have any such grounds for hope? Even the most sanguine individual could hardly anticipate the miracle which was obviously required. There was nothing Abraham himself could do to realise his dream. There was nothing in his circumstances which presented the slightest grounds for his hope—except one thing. God had promised: 'Sarah . . . shall bear thee a son.' Abraham believed that what God had promised, He would perform. So he waited, full of hope, eagerly anticipating that joyful day when at last he would have a son and heir. His hope was not disappointed.

Abraham's hope, and Biblical hope in general, is inseparable from faith in God. The one springs from the other. If faith is the conviction that God exists, and that He will fulfil His promises to mankind, then hope is the inevitable consequence of that conviction—the eager anticipation of the future which God has promised. Faith, says the writer to the Hebrews, is essentially '*being sure of what we hope for*'.<sup>2</sup>

### A HOPELESS WORLD

Such certainty is impossible for a world that does not believe in God. In Biblical terms, the world of unbelief is a world without hope. So the apostle Paul described the Christians at Ephesus before their conversion as being '*without Christ . . . having no hope, and without God in the world*'.<sup>3</sup> And he advised some bereaved disciples at Thessalonica that they ought not to mourn like '*others which have no hope*'.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, the pagan world in which the earliest Christians lived had its hopes, including a hope of life after death—but none of them could be guaranteed, and many of them were illusory, as even their own poets and philosophers recognised.

### REAL HOPE AND ITS FOUNDATION

The Christian was in an entirely different position. Those at Thessalonica, Paul said, were not to grieve unduly, because Jesus Christ had conquered death—God had raised him from the dead, and would one day send him back to raise all those who had died '*in him*', so that all believers could thereafter share eternal fellowship with God.<sup>5</sup> That was their hope. It was not an illusion, but based on God's past performance, on the incontrovertible evidence that He had raised His Son Jesus Christ from the dead.

<sup>2</sup>*Hebrews 11. 1 (NIV)*   <sup>3</sup>*Ephesians 2. 12*   <sup>4</sup>*I Thessalonians 4. 13*   <sup>5</sup>*I Thessalonians 4. 13-18*

Many times when the apostle Paul was called on to defend himself before the Roman authorities, he used the word 'hope' to epitomise everything in which he believed.

'Of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.'<sup>6</sup>

'I... am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers.'<sup>7</sup>

'For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.'<sup>8</sup>

One thing those words make very clear: Paul's hope, and that of all the earliest Christians, was founded on the Old Testament. It was the hope that all God had promised to the fathers of the Jewish people would be fulfilled—through Jesus Christ.

It was Abraham's hope that one day all nations on earth would be blessed through one of his descendants—Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup>

It was the hope of King David that one day his people, and all nations, would be ruled in peace for ever by one of his line—Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

It was the hope of Job, of David, of the prophet Daniel, that they would awake from the sleep of death, because the power of sin would one day be broken—by Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup>

This was the hope of the apostle Paul, and it remains the hope of all Christians worthy of the name. The lynchpin on which it depends is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

'If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile: you are still in your sins... If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.'<sup>12</sup>

Paul had seen and heard the risen Christ—his conviction was unshakeable. Many who have not in a literal sense either seen him or heard his voice, have nevertheless been just as convinced that the resurrection is a historical fact. If it is not, the hopes of a Christian are as vain and illusory as any other. If it is, both faith and hope can rest upon its rock-like foundation.

### A LIFE OF HOPE

With such a vision of the future, the Christian is well-equipped to face whatever life may throw at him. His hope does not offer present gain or advantage, although it does confer great spiritual blessings. '*Godliness with contentment is great*

<sup>6</sup>Acts 23. 6 <sup>7</sup>Acts 26. 6 <sup>8</sup>Acts 28. 20 <sup>9</sup>Genesis 12. 3; Galatians 3. 16 <sup>10</sup>II Samuel 7; Luke 1. 32, 33

<sup>11</sup>Job 19. 25, 26; Psalm 17. 15; Daniel 12. 2 <sup>12</sup>I Corinthians 15. 17-20 (NIV)

gain'—and contentment is a blessing denied many in this grasping and acquisitive society in which we live. But in general the experience of many Christians through the ages has been of difficulty, opposition and often outright persecution. In this respect, as in all things, Jesus showed his followers the way, looking beyond the hatred, the agony of his sufferings, to the glory which he knew would be his in the future.

'For the joy that was set before him (he) endured the cross, despising the shame.'<sup>13</sup>

Paul was similarly motivated to endure the harassment of his enemies and the most acute physical discomfort as he travelled through Asia and the Middle East.

*'I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.'*<sup>14</sup> In the passage that follows, Paul pictures the whole of creation as being in a state of perpetual anticipation, eagerly waiting for the day when God's glory will be revealed in the earth, when all the futility and frustration of the present will be removed, and the whole creation liberated from sin and decay to enjoy the richness of God's future kingdom.<sup>15</sup> He longed for that day:

'We ourselves . . . wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.'<sup>16</sup>

### HOPE FOR THE WORLD—A HOPE FOR YOU

Who would deny that we need a hope like that?

Nothing could be more relevant to our needs as individuals, and to the problems of the world in which we live. Nineteen centuries after Paul wrote, the creation remains as much subject to vanity and frustration as ever, in spite of the near-miraculous advances of modern science. The problem lies not in man's abilities or potential, which appear almost limitless (as one might expect of a creature made in God's image), but in his moral weakness, his total inability to control and direct his own ingenuity. So the miracle of modern medicine is accompanied by the horrors of pollution, the imminent threat of nuclear destruction. The marvel of the printed word is expressed in floods of worthless and evil literature, at the cost of the measurable depletion of the world's forests every day and the distortion of the world's ecology. Millions starve and die whilst improved agricultural technology produces ever higher grain yields—for those who can afford it. The insatiable appetite of a consumer society ravages the earth's resources.

<sup>13</sup>Hebrews 12. 2    <sup>14</sup>Romans 8. 18    <sup>15</sup>Romans 8. 19-22    <sup>16</sup>Romans 8. 23,24 (NIV)

In 1972 the 'Ecologist' magazine published a major study of the earth's resources, and the present state of western society—'A Blueprint for Survival'. The Preface opened with these words:

'An examination of the relevant information available has impressed upon us the extreme gravity of the global situation today. For, if current trends are allowed to persist, the breakdown of society and the irreversible disruption of the life-support systems on this planet, possibly by the end of the century, certainly within the lifetimes of our children, are inevitable.'

'The Blueprint . . .' received very influential support from many quarters—some, inevitably, pooh-poohed it. Since then, little has changed. Some progress has been made in pollution control; in some areas the world's population growth has not been as high as predicted; but fundamentally the problems remain. Not one of the proposals suggested has been implemented. No government on earth has the will and the authority to bring about the radical changes needed.

The result—a collision course with the inevitable. Sooner or later the world, as H. G. Wells predicted, will come to the 'end of its tether'.

Could anything more graphically illustrate the apostle Paul's description of a '*creation . . . subject to frustration . . . groaning as in the pains of childbirth*'?<sup>17</sup> Jesus said the world would be just like this, immediately before his coming: '*nations will be in anguish and perplexity . . . Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world.*'<sup>18</sup>

But God has given us hope.

He offers hope to this tiny planet on which we live—He offers hope to each of us as individuals. He has demonstrated His love for us in the most astonishing intervention on our behalf—the provision of His only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He has given us all the evidence we need on which to pin our faith.

How can we fail to embrace the hope He offers us?

Where else can we go?

'*Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.*'<sup>19</sup>

Roy Toms  
Redhill

<sup>17</sup>*Romans 8. 20, 22 (NIV)*    <sup>18</sup>*Luke 21. 25-26 (NIV)*    <sup>19</sup>*John 6. 68*